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GOVERNOR



**KARYN POLITO**  
LT. GOVERNOR

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**Baker-Polito Administration Announces State Support for High-Speed Internet Expansion in Western Massachusetts**

*State will Partner and Invest with Towns to Address the 'Last Mile' Challenge, Helping Unserved Residents and Businesses Compete in the Digital Global Economy*

**BOSTON** – Today, Governor Charlie Baker and Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito announced their commitment to broadband expansion initiatives designed to narrow existing gaps in high-speed Internet access for residents and businesses in Western Massachusetts.

The Baker-Polito Administration will commit up to \$50 million in existing capital funding to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) for broadband expansion initiatives. These state funds will be used to catalyze significant additional municipal and private investment, and will support innovative, sustainable, locally-led projects.

“Providing high-speed broadband access to all cities and towns is not only a matter of basic fairness, but it is an essential part of building stronger communities and a stronger economy,” said **Governor Baker**. “It’s time that we connect cities and towns throughout Massachusetts to the high-speed broadband service that is critical in today’s digital world.”

“This administration is committed to empowering residents and unleashing entrepreneurial activity throughout the Commonwealth,” said **Lieutenant Governor Polito**. “With this funding, we are one step closer towards closing the digital divide that continues to hinder residents and businesses in Western Massachusetts.”

The announcement came after a joint meeting of the Executive Committee of the

Massachusetts Technology Collaborative Board of Directors and the MBI Board of Directors. The MBI, a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, is the state entity designated to partner with municipalities, residents, and providers to support development of these broadband expansion solutions.

"Despite the current budget deficit, the Baker-Polito Administration remains committed to investing in our regional economies, and creating partnerships that empower communities to be great," **said Housing and Economic Development Secretary Jay Ash.** "I look forward to working with the Broadband Institute to extend broadband service to additional areas of Massachusetts."

"I applaud Governor Baker's decision to release these funds," **said Senate President Stan Rosenberg.** "It is another clear signal that, even though we have a new Administration, we are still fully committed to creating long promised access to high speed internet for the businesses, students, and residents of our region."

"This is the beginning of the end of the digital divide in western Massachusetts," **said State Senator Benjamin B. Downing.** "Connecting all of our residents will create jobs and help the region's economy thrive."

"I am grateful for Governor Baker's commitment to our continued progress in bringing broadband service to our undeserved residents and businesses in western Massachusetts," **said Representative Stephen Kulik.** "Our rural communities must have high-speed broadband in order to function in the modern world and to compete in today's economy. The release of this \$50 million in state funds, and the partnership with local governments, moves us significantly closer to building the network and finishing the job."

Currently, 45 Western Massachusetts towns lack any residential cable or broadband access, relying upon DSL or dial-up technologies. Further, many towns have existing cable franchise agreements which provide high-speed Internet access to a part of town, but do not serve the entire community. Planning, evaluation and program development is underway for several key projects which will benefit from state investment, including:

- Construction of a regional fiber-to-the-home network in interested towns currently lacking any residential broadband;
- Investment support for the town of Leverett, which is leveraging the *MassBroadband 123* network and municipal investment to construct their own fiber to the home network; and
- A program using state investment to foster public-private partnerships which will expand residential broadband access in communities with existing cable

franchise agreements that do not serve the entire community, primarily due to low population density.

“We thank the Baker-Polito Administration for their support of our efforts to deliver high-speed broadband connections to the households and businesses in unserved areas of Massachusetts,” said Eric Nakajima, Director of the MBI at MassTech. “This funding will help us make the construction of these ‘Last Mile’ networks a reality.”

Using an initial \$40 million state capital investment and a \$45.2 million federal stimulus grant, the MBI built and operates *MassBroadband 123*, a 1,200 mile fiber backbone for Western and Central Massachusetts. *MassBroadband 123* also provides direct connectivity to 1,100 community anchor institutions, such as schools, libraries, town halls, and public safety facilities. *MassBroadband 123* provides the needed platform for future broadband expansion and has reduced the cost curve for future expansion directly to residents and businesses. Many broadband expansion projects supported with state investment will leverage *MassBroadband 123*, and all programs and initiatives receiving state investment will need to demonstrate strong local support, often including municipal investment.

#### **About the Massachusetts Broadband Institute at MassTech**

A division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute at MassTech (MBI) is working to extend high-speed Internet access to homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices, and other public places across the Commonwealth, allowing for greater participation in the global economy and civic society. The MBI also promotes broadband usage and adoption by residents and small businesses. Learn more at <http://broadband.masstech.org>.

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